

### Call to Worship

*But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence will I bow down toward your holy temple. Lead me, O Lord, in your righteousness ... (Ps 5-7-8a)*

### Worship in song: *by Charles Wesley*

1. Sing to the great Jehovah's praise! All praise to Him belongs:  
Who kindly lengthens out our days demands our choicest songs.
2. His providence has brought us through another various year:  
We all with vows and anthems new before our God appear.
3. Father, Thy mercies past we own; Thy still continued care;  
To Thee presenting, through Thy Son, whate'er we have or own.
4. Our lips and lives shall gladly show the wonders of Thy love,  
While on in Jesu's steps we go to see Thy face above.
5. Our residue of days or hours Thine, wholly Thine, shall be;  
And all our consecrated powers a sacrifice to Thee.

### Reading from the Psalms

- Psalm 5

### Prayer of confession

Almighty God, we declare you to be our Lord.

We do so knowing that we have not always allowed you to be Lord over all areas of life. We therefore come to you, hiding nothing, asking your forgiveness, in the confidence of your love.

You have designed us for goodness, but we have not been good.

You have called us to declare your greatness, but we have been silent.

You have called us to engage in mission, but we have not joined the battle.

You have called us to be your witnesses empowered by your Spirit, but we have chosen to believe we are weak.

You have called us to live lives of faith, but we have doubted you.

In your mercy, forgive us.

Renew us in the power of your spirit to live the ministry of Jesus to your glory.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

### Assurance of forgiveness

*If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness. (Ps 130:3-4).*

### Prayer of thanksgiving

Loving God,

We thank you for the way your Spirit compels us to welcome the broken and lonely into our community, with the high hope that they will find your healing.

Thank you for rescuing us from meaninglessness into a community engaged in bringing your kingdom to places where there is darkness.

We delight in your call for us to be a distinctive people displaying the character of Christ.

You have given us significance;

You have given us a future;

You have given us a mission.

We stand amazed at all you have done and are grateful beyond words that you should choose us to partner with you in building your kingdom.

### The Bible Reading

- Genesis 1:1-3,26-31

### The Message

#### **KNOW THE MEANING OF CREATION**

It all begins with love.

Love by definition reaches out beyond the self. Love can't exist without "the other".

This, incidentally helps us understand the trinity of God. John 4:8 says simply, "God is love". There can be no love without the other, therefore it is not surprising that the one true God of love lives within himself in perfect community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Love cannot be love without the 'other'.

True love reaches beyond the self. It gives honour and worth to another. It seeks to be personal with another. It is saying that 'the other' matters to you; 'the other' fulfils you.

Love is an outward generosity of spirit. Perfectly expressed, love is state of mind and heart that can't stop loving. If love stopped loving, it would be fickle. If love was just reserved for certain people, love would depend on you belonging to a particular family or ethnic group. This sort of love is little more than the biological love evolution instils in us to ensure that we animals look after our young and our herd.

But perfect love can't stop loving, it can't stop including, it can't stop honouring, it can't help expanding to include others in its future ...AND THIS WAS THE REASON GOD CREATED YOU AND ME.

God, being a God of love, created the universe in order to embrace it, including you and me, into his love. Therefore, creation is an act of love. So, respect it an honour it.

Creation, you, me... are loved by God.

Creation didn't need to exist. God doesn't *need* us or creation to be who he is. Creation was God's freely chosen act of will. Creation was something God chose to do because he

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chose to expand the orbit of his love to include us. God chose to be passionate about the idea of... you.

There is, therefore, a profound significance to the story of God creating the universe being at the beginning of the book of Genesis.

At a time when most people thought that the sun they saw each day in the sky was a god, the book of Genesis said that sun (and everything else that exists) is created by the one true God.

At a time when paganism, New Age and many Eastern religions teach that creation is itself God and that each bit of creation is thin slice of God, Genesis says that God stands separate from his creation. Creation is not God; therefore, you are not to commit idolatry by worshipping it. It is God you should worship.

At a time when other philosophies tell us that the universe is eternal, Genesis says “no”. Once there was nothing... and then God created... and both time and the universe came into being.

At a time when scientist tell us that the universe will continue to expand for millions of years, gradually subsiding in energy states until it disappears as low level radiation, we read that God stands outside of time and can therefore guarantee an eternal future.

At a time when nihilists who despair of meaning and purpose stand appalled at the senselessness of creation and the worthlessness of it, God declares in Genesis that his creation is “good”, i.e. it has value to him (Gen 1:31). We are therefore not free to despoil it for selfish, short-term financial gain. It matters to God.

We learn from Genesis that humankind is made in God's image (Gen 1:26). In other words, we have the capacity for moral choice, the capacity to have a personal relationship with God and the capacity to exercise rule on earth. Rule does not mean ruin. Genesis tells us that God put humankind into the garden of his creation to tend it and take care of it (Gen 2:15). Our responsibility is therefore to make it fruitful, not to pillage and spoil it for selfish reasons.

Christians, of all people, should know their mandate to tend and take care of creation. The fact that some misguided Christians think that the injunction in Genesis to “subdue the earth” is a license for environmental destruction, shows crass ignorance of the teaching of all of Genesis. Some have latched hold of this verse in isolation of the others in order to give themselves a moral justification for raping the environment and killing the objects of God's love. How tragic! A holistic reading of Genesis makes it clear that we are to subdue in the same way that a farmer subdues a garden in order to make it fruitful.

God's creation was God's radical act of love and is an object of love – so value it, including yourselves.

Let me share further the full extent of God's love, first shown in creation. God took an appalling risk in order to win our freely chosen love. He gave us free-will to accept or reject his love and lordship. You too have that same choice. Humanity, by and large, has rejected God's love and authority. We hear this truth in the story of Adam and Eve. They were invited to eat the fruit of thousands of trees in the garden,

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except one. God was extraordinarily generous, but humanity was determinedly rebellious. Even though God “*richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment*” (1 Tim 6:17), we chose to eat the fruit of the tree that was forbidden and do the things which hurt us.

It is interesting to note what the two temptations were to which Adam and Eve, and all of humanity since, have succumbed (Gen 3:5-6).

The first was the temptation to be like God in knowing things, particularly right and wrong. How often today do you hear academics, media personalities and perhaps yourself say, “I think my belief about God is just as correct as anything God may have caused to be written the Bible”? We have made gods of our own opinion and intellect and compete with God with our opinions on what is fundamentally true and right.

The second temptation was “Why should you deny yourself anything you desire?”. We hear people who have turned away from God's love and lordship saying similar things today. And in the background, Satan is encouraging their disobedience saying, “Are you sure God said that? No! don't believe God when he says you will die as a result” (Gen 3:1-4). Satan and his followers say the same today. Watch out!

So it was that the people God created to love turned away from God. The tragic consequence of this, the Genesis story tells us, is that suffering and death became a feature of our existence (Gen 3:14-19).

The Christian story is the story of God rescuing humankind back to himself.

It is an amazing story. Why would God continue to love a sinful humanity? God does so because real love is unconditional. God's love is described by the Greek word *agapé*, which means love that is unmerited and undeserved. As such, it is a safe love that is independent of the circumstances. It's always there. God's love looks deeper than any physical, psychological, intellectual and moral flaws. God's love makes broken people sacred. God's love imputes value. It looks for a relationship of love... and never gives up hoping that we will choose it.

To those of you with poor self-esteem, who try to earn God's love by what you do, please stop. You will only make yourself feel wretched with your failures. Satan knows this and constantly accuses you of not measuring up to God's standards. Not for nothing is he known as the “accuser” (Rev 12:10). However, if you know that you are safe in God's love, you will then respond with your own love. Then your motivation for doing the things of God will be grateful love rather than legalism. The truth is, there is nothing you can do that will cause God to love you more. God loves you for who you are rather than what you do.

But even this is not the whole story of God's love. The saga of God's love continues; it continues into the shocking plan God put into place to win humanity back to himself. This plan involved the Father asking the Son to come to Earth, to share our life of suffering and to die an agonising and humiliating death in order to pay the price for your sins and mine that would otherwise keep us from God's holy presence. As we were, in our sin, God could have nothing to do with us. He could not ignore our sin and turn a blind eye to it if he was to stay truly holy and just. Neither could any of us claim to

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be without sin. The Bible says that “*all have sinned and fallen short of God's Glory*” (Rom 3:23). Therefore, God devised a terrible plan whereby he would not ignore our sins but he would pay the price for them on our behalf.

God's Son died on a cross to pay the price for our sins and deal with them forever. It only remains for us to accept it.

As you can see, the creation story has become even more poignant. A God whose love would cause him to suffer death for us demands our attention. The question is: how will you respond to it? Is it time you said “yes” to God and began to live your eternal destiny? If so, I invite you to pray a prayer with me in which you ask Jesus to forgive your sins and become the leader of your life.

*"Heavenly Father, thank you for your love for me.*

*Thank you for sending Jesus to die for me to pay the price for my sins.*

*I turn from them now and ask you to forgive me for living life without you in the past.*

*I accept you as my Lord and ask that you fill me with the empowering presence of your spirit so that I can follow Jesus faithfully and fulfil your purpose for my life, Amen."*

### Prayers for others

Pray with passion for those things God has placed on your heart, remembering the persecuted church, world events, the sick and our leaders.

### Benediction

Dare to care, dare to share, dare to love and may the blessing of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and always.

*This service was prepared by Nick Hawkes for HopeNet SA*